

The Foundation of Humanity: Abraham's Journey

And Avram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son ... and the souls they had acquired in Haran, and they went to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:5)

The Mishnah indicates that at this point mankind had the opportunity for growth and connection with God through Avram and Sarai (Mishnah 5:2). Rabbeinu Yonah (d. 1263) comments that whereas others had failed in God's mission for them, Avram and Sarai did enough for all of them put together (*ibid.*).

Yet it was not just that Avram and Sarai were righteous. There are three key elements to the beginning of their story which can be found in this week's Torah portion. The first is that while they originally set out on their journey with Lot, they eventually part ways (Genesis 13:9). This indicates more than just a breakdown in relationships. Rashi (d. 1105) explains that Lot's shepherds grazed their flock on other people's land which resulted in the quarrel between them and Avram's shepherds (*ibid.* 7). Avram wanted to avoid conflict and realised the only way to do so would be to separate from Lot and his company.

The second element comes from a comment made by Rashi (Genesis 12:5) which says that Avram and Sarai took with them 'the souls they had acquired in Haran'. Rashi explains that both Avram and Sarai took ordinary people and 'brought them under the wings of the Divine presence', converting them to monotheism and recognising God.

The third theme is that of covenant. Firstly, we read about the covenant between the parts (Genesis 15) and secondly the changing of Avram and Sarai to Avraham and Sarah (Genesis 17). This establishes them as the progenitors of monotheism and ancestors of many nations.

The three elements found in the parsha are critical for this role: a separation from evil (Lot), a desire to reach out to others and the covenant with God.

In the final stage, we will discover the way by which Avraham and Sarah begin the new generations through their son Yitzchak (Isaac).

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